

(5) Certify to the type of department, i.e., volunteer/combination or career.

(b) Recipients (Grantees) must agree to:

(1) Share in the costs of the projects funded under this grant program. Fire departments in areas serving populations over 50,000 must agree to match the Federal grant funds with an amount of non-Federal funds equal to 30 percent (30%) of the total project cost. Fire departments serving areas with a population of 50,000 or less will have to match the Federal grant funds with an amount of non-Federal funds equal to 10 percent (10%) of the total project cost. All cost-share contributions must be cash. No “in-kind” contributions will be considered for the statutorily required cost-share. No waivers of this requirement will be granted except for fire departments of Insular Areas as provided for in 48 U.S.C. 1469a.

(2) Maintain operating expenditures in the areas funded by this grant activity at a level equal to or greater than the average of their operating expenditures in the two years preceding the year in which this assistance is received.

(3) Retain grant files and supporting documentation for three years after the conclusion of the grant.

(4) Report to FEMA on the progress made on the grant and financial status of the grant.

(5) Make their grant files, books and records available if requested for an audit to ensure compliance with any requirement of the grant program.

(6) Provide information to the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) national fire incident reporting system (NFIRS) for the period covered by the assistance. If a grantee does not currently participate in the incident reporting system and does not have the capacity to report at the time of the award, that grantee must agree to provide information to the system for a twelve-month period commencing as soon as they develop the capacity to report.

(c) *FEMA activities:* (1) We will ensure that the funds are awarded based on the priorities and expected benefits articulated in the statute, this part 152, and USFA’s strategic plan. USFA’s operational and performance objectives

of its strategic plan are to reduce losses of life and reduce economic losses due to fire and related emergencies. Specific target groups are children under 14 years old, seniors over 65 years old, and firefighters.

(2) We will ensure that not more than twenty-five percent (25%) of the appropriated funding will be used to purchase firefighting vehicles.

(3) We will ensure that not less than five percent (5%) of the appropriated funds are made available to national, State, local, or community organizations, including fire departments, for the purpose of carrying out fire prevention programs.

(4) We will ensure that fire departments with volunteer staff, or staff comprised of a combination of career fire fighters and volunteers, receive a proportion of the total grant funding that is not less than the proportion of the United States population that those firefighting departments protect.

(5) We will ensure that grants are made to fire departments located in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

(6) We will strive to ensure geographic diversity of awards as stipulated in §152.6.

**§ 152.5 Review process and evaluation criteria.**

(a) We will use the narratives/supplemental information provided by the applicants in their grant applications to evaluate, on a competitive basis, the merits and benefits of each request for funding. In selecting applications for award, we will evaluate each application for assistance independently based on established eligibility criteria, the program priorities, the financial needs of the applicant, and an analysis of the benefits that would result from the grant award. Every application will be evaluated based on the answers to the activity-specific questions during our initial screening. The applications that are determined to best address the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program’s established priorities during this initial screening will be in the “competitive range” and subject to a second level of review.

(b)(1) In order to be successful at this level of the evaluation, an applicant

must complete the narrative section of the application package. The narrative should include a detailed description of the planned activities and uses for the grant funds including details of each budget line item. For example, if personnel costs are included in the budget, please provide a break down of what those costs are for. The narrative should explain why the grant funds are needed and why the department has not been able to obtain funding for the planned activities on its own. A discussion of financial need should include a discussion of any Federal funding received for similar activities. Finally, the applicant's narrative will detail the benefits the department or community will realize as a result of the grant award.

(2) Applicants may seek assistance in formulating their cost-benefit statement or any other justification required by the application by contacting our Grant Program Technical Assistance Center at 866-274-0960 or by email at [USFAGRANTS@fema.gov](mailto:USFAGRANTS@fema.gov). We will also place information to assist you in the development of a competitive grant application on the FEMA/USFA websites.

(c) This second level of review will be conducted using a panel of technical evaluation panelists that assess the application's merits with respect to the clarity and detail provided in the narrative about the project, the applicant's financial need, and the project's purported benefit to be derived from the cost. The technical evaluation panelists will independently score each application before them and then discuss the merits/shortcomings of the application in an effort to reconcile any major discrepancies. A consensus on the score is not required. The highest scoring applications will then be considered for award. We seek to maximize the benefits derived from the funding by crediting applicants with the greatest financial need and whose proposed activities provide the greatest benefit.

(d) In addition to the project narrative, the applicant must provide an itemized budget detailing the use of the grant funds. If an applicant is seeking funds in more than one eligible activity within a program, separate budgets will have to be generated for each

activity and then an overall or summary budget would have to be generated. For those applicants applying on line, the summary budget will be automatically generated by the e-grant system.

(e) Specific rating criteria for each of the eligible programs follow in paragraphs (e)(1) through (4) of this section. These rating criteria will provide an understanding of the grant program's priorities and the expected cost effectiveness of any proposed projects.

(1) *Fire Operations and Firefighter Safety Program*—(i) *Training Activities*. We believe that more benefit is derived from the direct delivery of training than from the purchase of training materials, equipment or props. Therefore, applications focused on direct delivery of training will receive a higher competitive rating. We also believe that funding of basic firefighting training to an operational level (i.e., training in basic firefighting duties or operating fire apparatus) has greater cost-benefit than funding of officer training. Likewise, we feel there is a greater cost-benefit to officer training than for other specialized training. Train-the-trainer activities are rated high due to the obvious return on investment. We will also accord higher rating to programs achieving benefits from statutorily required training over non-mandatory or strictly voluntary training. Finally, we will rate more highly those programs that benefit the highest percentage of targeted personnel within a fire department. Training designated for Rapid Intervention Teams will have a slightly higher competitive advantage.

(ii) *Wellness and Fitness Activities*. We believe that in order to have an effective wellness/fitness program, fire departments must offer both an entry physical examination and an immunization program. Accordingly, applicants in this category must currently offer both benefits, or must propose to initiate both a physical examination and an immunization program with these grant funds in order to receive additional consideration for funding this activity. We believe the greatest benefit will be realized by supporting new wellness and fitness programs, and

therefore, we will accord higher competitive ratings to those applicants lacking wellness/fitness programs over those applicants that already possess a wellness/fitness program. We believe that programs with annual physicals and general health screening provide high benefits and programs with incident rehabilitation, formal fitness regimens, and/or injury prevention components offer significant benefits. Finally, since participation is critical to achieving any benefits from a wellness or fitness program, we will give higher competitive rating to departments whose wellness and fitness programs mandate participation as well as programs that provide incentives for participation.

(iii) *Firefighting Equipment Acquisition.* We believe that this grant program will achieve the greatest benefits if we provide funds to fire departments purchasing basic firefighting equipment. We will afford departments buying basic firefighting equipment for the first time (equipment never owned before) a higher competitive rating than departments buying replacement equipment or equipment that will be used to expand the department's capabilities into new mission areas. We believe there is more benefit realized to bring a department up to the applicable minimum standard (i.e., as required by statute, regulation, or professional firefighting guidance), rather than to the department that is replacing equipment or enhancing capabilities. Because of the obvious benefits, we will also give higher competitive rating to departments that are mainly purchasing equipment designed to protect the safety of the firefighters. Equipment designated for Rapid Intervention Teams will have a slightly higher competitive advantage.

(iv) *Personal Protective Equipment Acquisition.* One of the stated purposes of this grant program is to protect the health and safety of firefighters. In order to achieve this goal and maximize the benefit to the firefighting community, we believe that we must fund those applicants needing to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to a high percentage of their personnel. Accordingly, we will give a high competitive rating in this cat-

egory to fire departments in which a large percentage of their active firefighting staff do not have any personal protective equipment and to departments that wish to purchase enough PPE to equip one hundred percent (100%) of their active firefighting staff. The goal is to provide all active firefighters with a complete set of equipment, breathing apparatus as well as turnout gear. We will also give a higher competitive rating to departments that are purchasing the equipment for the first time as opposed to departments replacing obsolete or substandard equipment (e.g., equipment that does not meet current National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards), or purchasing equipment for a new mission. Departments that are replacing used gear that is very old, will be afforded a higher competitive rating than a department whose gear is relatively new. We will provide a higher competitive rating to departments requesting integrated Personal Accountability Safety System (PASS) devices than to those departments that are requesting non-integrated PASS devices. We also believe it is more cost beneficial to fund departments that have a high volume of responses per year before funding less active departments. Equipment designated for Rapid Intervention Teams will have a slightly higher competitive advantage.

(2) *Fire Prevention Program.* We believe that the public as a whole will receive the greatest benefit by creating new fire prevention programs.

(i) Our priority is to target these funds to fire departments that do not have an existing fire prevention program as opposed to those departments that already have such a program. Also, we believe the public will benefit greatly from establishing fire prevention programs that will continue beyond the grant year as opposed to limited efforts. Therefore, we will give a higher competitive rating to programs that will be self-sustaining after the grant period.

(ii) Because of the benefits to be attained, we will give a higher competitive rating to programs that target one or more of USFA's identified high-risk

populations (i.e., children under fourteen years of age, seniors over sixty-five and firefighters), and programs whose impact is/will be periodically evaluated.

(iii) We believe that public education programs, programs that develop and enforce fire codes and standards, and arson prevention and detection programs have a high benefit, therefore, they will receive the highest competitive rating.

(iv) We also believe programs that purchase and install residential and public detection and suppression systems provide significant benefits.

(v) Programs that are limited to the purchase of public information materials and presentation aids and equipment achieve the least benefit, therefore, these types of activities will receive a lower competitive rating.

(3) *Emergency Medical Services Program.* Our overall objective in this program is to elevate all emergency medical services to an intermediate life-support level (i.e., EMT-D or EMT-I).

(i) We believe that enhancing or expanding an existing service that currently meets basic life-support to an intermediate life-support system would realize the most benefit. We will give a higher competitive rating to fire departments that are planning on acquiring an intermediate life-support system than to those that wish to reach a basic life-support level.

(ii) We also believe that it is more cost effective to expand an existing service than it would be to create a new service. Therefore, we will give a higher competitive rating for fire departments that are enhancing their existing service over those that do not have an emergency medical service.

(iii) While we support CPR and first-responder level training, we will afford a lower priority to train firefighters in basic emergency medical technology (EMT-B) certification levels. We do not believe that it is our mission to create emergency medical services in areas where the local authorities have not yet committed to providing such services.

(4) *Firefighting Vehicle Program.* (i) We believe that more benefit will be realized by funding fire departments that own few or no firefighting apparatus

than by providing funding to a department with numerous vehicles. Therefore, we will give a higher competitive rating in the apparatus category to fire departments that own few or no firefighting vehicles. We will also give higher competitive rating to departments that have not recently purchased a new firefighting vehicle, and departments that wish to replace an old, high-mileage vehicle or a vehicle that has sustained a high number of responses.

(ii) Because of the significant cost of certain types of apparatus and the limited amount of funding available in this program, we do not believe that it would be cost effective to fund vehicles with ladder or aerial apparatus. Therefore, we will lower the competitive rating of applications proposing such purchases.

(iii) Vehicles that are for basic firefighting operations (i.e., pumpers, tankers, and brush trucks) are considered to have higher benefits than vehicles that have limited or specialized uses.

(iv) We believe that more benefit will accrue to a community that needs a new vehicle (i.e., the initial purchase of a new or used vehicle) than for communities that need to replace a vehicle that does not conform to applicable standards. Replacing a vehicle has more benefit than purchasing a vehicle to expand the operational capacity of a department into a new mission area.

(v) While no competitive advantage has been assigned to the purchase of commercial vehicles versus custom vehicles, or used vehicles versus new vehicles in the preliminary evaluation of applications, it has been our experience that depending on the type and size of department, the technical evaluation panelists often prefer low-cost vehicles when evaluating the cost/benefit section of the project narratives. Panelists will be provided with guidance (such as the General Services Administration's price schedules) for use in their evaluation on the reasonableness of vehicle costs.

(vi) Finally, we believe that it would be more beneficial to the nation if we gave these vehicle awards to as many fire departments as possible, therefore,

## **§ 152.6**

we will allow each fire department to apply for only one vehicle per year.

### **§ 152.6 Application review and award process.**

(a) As stated in §152.5, we will evaluate each application in the preliminary screening process to determine which applications best address the program's established priorities. The best applications as determined in this preliminary step will be deemed to be in the "competitive range." All applications in the competitive range will be subject to a second level review by a technical evaluation panel. Using the evaluation criteria delineated in §152.5, the panelists will score each application they evaluate. The assigned score will reflect the degree to which the applicant: clearly relates their proposed project; demonstrates financial need; and, details a high benefit to cost value of the proposed activities.

(b) Our award decisions will be based on the stated priorities of the grant program, the demonstrated need of the applicant, and the benefits to be derived from the proposed projects. We will make awards on a competitive basis, i.e., we will fund the highest scored applications before considering lower scored applications.

(c) In order to fulfill our obligations under the law, we may also make funding decisions using rank order as the preliminary basis then based on the type of fire department (paid, volunteer, or combination fire departments), the size and character of the community it serves (urban, suburban, or rural), and the geographic location of the fire department. In these instances where we are making decisions based on geographic location, we will use States as the basic geographic unit.

### **§ 152.7 Grant payment, reporting and other requirements.**

(a) Grantees will have twelve months to incur obligations to fulfill their responsibilities under this grant program. The performance period of each grant will be detailed in the Articles of Agreement that we provide each grantee. Grantees may request funds from us as reimbursement for expenditures made under the grant program or they may request funds for immediate cash

## **44 CFR Ch. I (10–1–02 Edition)**

needs under FEMA regulations (44 CFR 13.21).

(b) Generally, fire departments should not use grant funds to pay for products and services contracted for, or purchased prior to the effective date of the grant. However, we will consider requests for reimbursement for these on an exceptional basis. Expenses incurred after the application deadline but prior to award may be eligible for reimbursement if the expenses were justified, unavoidable, consistent with the scope of work, and specifically approved by us.

(c) The recipients of funding under this program must report to us on how the grant funding was used and the benefits that resulted from the grant. This will be accomplished via submission of a final report. Details regarding the reporting requirements will be provided in the Articles of Agreement provided to each grantee. Additionally, fire departments that receive funding under this program must agree to provide information to the national fire incident reporting system (NFIRS) for the period covered by the assistance. If a grantee does not currently participate in the incident reporting system and does not have the capacity to report at the time of the award, that grantee must agree to provide information to the system for a twelve-month period commencing as soon as they develop the capacity to report.

### **§ 152.8 Application submission and deadline.**

For each year that this program is authorized after fiscal year 2002, we will announce the grants availability via Notice of Funds Availability. That notice will contain all pertinent information concerning the eligible funding activities, priority funding levels (as appropriate), application period, timelines, and deadlines.

### **§ 152.9 Technical or procedural error.**

(a) We will review our decision with respect to a particular application only where the applicant alleges that we have made a material technical or procedural error and can substantiate